

Legal Lot Determination

What is a legal lot?

A legal lot is a parcel of land that is consistent with the zoning and platting laws that were in place when it was originally created. Zoning standards specify the minimum lot size and dimensional requirements that apply to all properties, depending upon their location. Platting standards specify the type of county review process required to legally create new lots. If a parcel meets the requirements in place when originally created, and doesn't change, it will remain a legal lot, even if the requirements change later.

The majority of parcels in Clark County are legal lots, even those smaller than current zoning requirements. Owners of lots of record are eligible to apply for building permits or other development applications, unless they are prevented from doing so by a court or Growth Management Hearings Board order.

What is the purpose of these requirements?

State law requires that counties and cities have platting review processes and minimum zoning standards in place. However, the particular processes and standards are left up to the local government. State law also prohibits local governments from issuing any permits on illegally created lots.

Platting laws create a review process to ensure that newly created lots have adequate provisions for roads, sewer, water and other services before they are sold. Zoning laws create minimum lot sizes so that development patterns and densities in

particular areas are generally compatible. Larger lot size standards in the rural area ensure that the area retains a rural character and that opportunities for farming, forestry, etc., continue to exist as the county grows.

Aren't all parcels for which taxes are paid legal lots?

No, not necessarily. Under Washington law, the county assessor is required to honor any taxpayer's request to segregate any portion of their property, even if the portion is too small or otherwise inconsistent with land use requirements. After the property is segregated, the assessor is obligated to treat it as a separate tax parcel. The assessor does not require compliance with any land use laws.

How can I tell if a particular parcel is a legal lot?

Here are a few shortcuts. If a parcel has a house or mobile home on it, there will be a legal lot of record if the owner obtained necessary building and/or placement permits, and the parcel hasn't been changed since that time.

If a parcel was part of a subdivision or short plat that was reviewed and approved by the county, and hasn't changed since approval, it is considered a legal lot. If a parcel hasn't changed since 1969, it is a legal lot.

If parcels can't be determined through these shortcuts, they are probably legal lots. The key factor is to know when the parcel was created, and what the zoning and platting requirements were in place at the time of creation.

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Community Development
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For an alternate format, contact the Clark County ADA Compliance Office.
Phone: (360) 397-2322
Relay: 711 or (800) 833-6384
E-mail: ADA@clark.wa.gov

If the above shortcuts are insufficient to prove a lot was legally created, a check of the sales deed history is required. You, or the seller, may already have previous recorded sales deeds along with other ownership documents. The county auditor keeps records of all recorded sales in the county. Or, for a small fee, a private title company can provide you with a recorded sales history for any parcel. Permit Center staff can help explain and identify the issues, but it does not keep records of private sales or transfers.

Can the county tell me if a parcel is a legal lot?

It depends on how much information can be provided about the parcel. You can call or visit the Permit Center staff located at the Public Services Center, 1300 Franklin Street, first floor, Vancouver, Washington, to get free, informal information about a parcel's legal lot status, depending on the time of creation. You can also apply for a formal legal lot determination that will provide a written, binding letter of proof about the parcel's status. In either case, information will need to be provided when the parcel was created.

Are Legal Lot Determination fees assessed on Building Permit Applications?

Yes, on historical lots originally created through tax segregation or other process that wasn't reviewed. Fees will be assessed for placement or replacement of homes or other primary structures. No fee is required for building permits on lots created through a platted land division or other process in which lot status was reviewed. Fees also won't be assessed for home remodels, expansions, or grading permits.

How can I find out what requirements were in place at the time my parcel was created?

Zoning and platting laws have changed over time. The changes listed below may help determine the applicable requirements:

Zoning - the minimum lot size and dimension requirements

- Prior to 1980, almost all rural areas had a 1-acre minimum lot size.
- In 1980, new rural zones were established ranging from a 1-acre minimum to 20-acre minimum.
- In December 1994, new rural zones were established ranging from a 5-acre minimum to 80-acre minimum.
- Call or visit the Permit Center for mapping of previous zoning requirements for specific properties.

Platting - the required review process for creating new lots

- Prior to August 21, 1969, a tax segregation recorded at the assessor's office is accepted as a legal lot.
- After August 21, 1969, creating lots of less than five acres, as part of land divisions of five or more lots, required county subdivision review and approval.
- After July 1, 1976, creating lots of less than five acres, as part of land divisions of four or fewer lots, required county short plat review and approval.
- After April 19, 1993, creating lots of less than 20 acres as part of any land division required county short plat or subdivision review and approval.

What should I do if I'm considering buying a parcel of land?

Although most parcels are legal lots, the status should be determined before purchase. Ask the seller for information about the parcel's status, sales history, previous building permits or county approvals that may have been obtained. You may also want to talk with county staff, or condition the sales agreement on a formal

legal lot determination or issuance of a building permit.

Transfer or sale of properties created in violation of land division laws is illegal under state law. If you have purchased property that is not a legal lot, you may wish to consult with an attorney to review your options. In such cases, state law allows you to rescind the sale or seek damages from the seller, including the costs of investigation and legal fees. You may also discuss possible remedial measures with county staff.

What if I already bought a parcel of land that was illegally created?

If your lot is determined to be illegally created (e.g., through a legal lot determination application), you may be eligible for an exception. The county does provide exceptions to the legal lot approval process, if certain criteria are met. There are three types of exceptions that include:

- Innocent Purchaser
- Public Interest
- Public Interest, Mandatory
- Public Interest, Discretionary

Innocent Purchaser. The innocent purchaser exception requires the subject parcel to meet minimum zoning requirements currently in effect or in effect at the time the parcel was created. The current owner must have purchased the property in good faith, and did not have knowledge that the property was divided from a larger parcel after the following dates:

- August 21, 1969, in the case of subdivisions.
- After July 1, 1976, in the case of short plats.
- After April 19, 1993, in the case of any segregation resulting in parcels of 5 acres or larger.

Public Interest Exception, Mandatory. To meet this exception the following applies:

- The parcel must have been created before January 1, 1995.
- Zoning - The parcel must meet the minimum zoning dimensional requirements currently in effect, including lot size, dimensions and frontage width.
- Platting – The improvements or conditions of approval, which would have been imposed if the parcel had been established through platting, are already present and completed or the property owner completes conditions of approval that the planning director determines would otherwise be imposed if the parcel had been established through platting under current standards.

Types of improvements that may be required to be constructed by the property owner include, but are not limited to, street and sidewalk improvements and stormwater facilities. In the urban area, extension of public water and sewer service may also be required.

Preliminary and final submittal plans shall be required where applicable. Such plans may require a professional engineer.

Public Interest Exception, Discretionary. The county may, but is not obligated to, determine that parcels meeting the following criteria are legal lots:

- Zoning - The parcel lacks sufficient area or dimension to meet current zoning requirements but meets minimum zoning dimensional requirements, including lot size, dimensions and frontage width in effect at the time the parcel was created.
- Platting – one of the following must be met.

- (a) The conditions of approval which would have been imposed if the parcel been established through platting under current standards are already present on the land.
- (b) The property owner completes conditions of approval that the planning director determines would otherwise be imposed if the parcel had been established through platting under current standards.

Types of improvements that may be required to be constructed by the property owner include, but are not limited to, street and sidewalk improvements and stormwater facilities. In the urban area, extension of public water and sewer service may also be required.

- The planning director shall apply the following factors in making a lot of record determination under the discretionary public interest exception.
 - The parcel size is generally consistent with surrounding lots of record within 1000 feet.
 - Recognition that the parcel does not adversely impact health or safety.
 - Recognition that the parcel does not adversely affect or interfere with the implementation of the comprehensive plan.
 - The parcel purchase value and subsequent tax assessments are consistent with a buildable legal lot.

Recognition of legal lot status based on the public interest exception shall be valid for five years from the date of legal lot determination or review in which the determination was made. If a building or other development permit is not sought within that time, the determination will expire. Applications for development or legal lot recognition submitted after five years shall require compliance with applicable standards at that time.

Note: This handout is not a substitute for county code. For more detailed information, please refer to Clark County Code Section 40.520.010 Legal Lot Determination

Submittal requirements
Legal Lot Determination

The following checklist identifies information to be included with the Application. All items with a bold underlined space (i.e.,) must be submitted before the application will be considered **Counter Complete**. All items with a checkbox must be submitted before the application will be determined **Fully Complete**.

1. Application form

The Development Review Application form shall be completed and original signed in ink by the applicant.

2. Application fee

The fee for a Legal Lot Determination shall accompany the application. The check is to be made payable to Clark County Community Development.

3. Legal description

A full and complete legal description of the property must be submitted, available from a title company or surveyor.

4. Sales history

A sales history of each parcel since 1969 must be submitted, and shall include the following:

- Copies of all deeds or real estate contracts showing previous owners or division for the original parcel
- Prior segregation requests
- Prior recorded surveys
- Other information demonstrating compliance with the approval criteria

Fee schedule

Legal Lot Determination

The following fees are required to be paid when the application is submitted.

Legal Lot Determination	\$350
Each additional lot	\$150
Issuance	\$53

Submittal requirements

Innocent purchaser exception, public interest exception, mandatory or public interest exception, discretionary information

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5. Narrative

Requests must include a written explanation of the circumstances surrounding the purchase of the property that demonstrates compliance with the innocent purchaser criteria. See CCC 40.520.010F).

6. Submittal copies

The applicant must select Option A or B below and proceed as follows:

Option A

Submit a CD in PDF format, with a paper copy of the full application package. Any special studies shall also be included on the CD. The proposed plans submitted must be scanned to an engineer's scale. The CD shall be organized as follows:

- The application submittal shall be organized in the same order as the table of contents, with a separate PDF document for each separate item.
- The PDF document must be organized into separate files. Each PDF file must be labeled with a number followed by a name (example):

1. Cover and table of contents
2. Application form

- 3. Application fee
- 4. etc.

Option B

- ___ One copy of the main submittal package with original signatures, bound by a jumbo clip or rubber band
- ___ Five copies of application with a full size set of plans
- ___ Separately bound copy of any special studies, such as wetland, floodplain, etc., as identified below:
 - One original and three copies - Traffic Study and Road Modification requests
 - One original and two copies of all other special studies or permits to include: Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARA) floodplain, geo-hazard, habitat, shoreline, stormwater, erosion control plan, and wetland
- ___ Two reduced copies of 11" x 17" for all sheets larger than 11" x 17".

Fee schedule

Innocent purchaser exception, public interest exception, mandatory or public interest exception, discretionary information

The following fees are required to be paid when the application is submitted.

Innocent Purchaser Exception	\$883
Issuance	\$53
Legal Lot Determination	\$350
Plus per lot over two	\$150

Plus the proportional share of allocable fees to the lots in question where the responsible official determines that additional environmental or plan submittals are necessary.

Public Interest Exception	\$3,628
Issuance	\$53
Fire Marshal	\$434

In a limited number of cases Development Engineering review is necessary.

Engineering deposit	\$200
Issuance	\$53

Engineering will bill at an hourly rate which must be fully paid before application is approved or finalized.